



Dr. Ralph T. Richards has filled in an important chapter of Utah history in his book about the progress of Utah medicine.

## Noted Doctor Pens History Of Utah Medical Progress

By William C. Patrick

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This book, "Of Medicine, Hospitals and Doctors" presents for the first time in comprehensive form a phase of Utah history that has long been neglected—the story of the struggle against disease and illness, the building of hospitals, the development of public health measures and brief sketches of some of the men who have figured most prominently in this phase of the state's existence.

The author, Dr. Ralph T. Richards, one of Utah's leading surgeons for many years, was eminently qualified for the task. His interest in the state and its people and his knowledge of medicine have enabled him to evaluate the factual information so patiently unearthed and present it in a volume that is a valuable contribution to Utah history.

### In Readable Style

This is not primarily a book for doctors or public health people, although none of them should miss reading it. Dr. Richards tells the story in readable style, mixing fact, anecdote and bits of humor, and has turned out a book that any thoughtful person would enjoy. He approaches his material as a realist, with no attempt to whitewash the black chapters in Utah's medical history or to detract from the heroic ones.

The author searched hospital and cemetery records for causes of death, and is able to present some facts that are startling, to say the least.

He found that lead poisoning, a disease contracted largely by those working in mines, was probably worse in Utah at one time than in any other mining area on the continent. After citing what evidence he could gather as to the incidence, he says: "Much further evidence of unrecorded lead poisonings can be offered, but enough is here presented to justify the opinion that there probably have been in excess of 100,000 cases of lead poisoning in Utah."

Dr. Richards notes that the disease has now been practically eliminated, due to a number of factors, including safety measures adopted by the mines themselves and medical advances in its detec-

tion and treatment. It was only in 1941, however, with the enactment of the Occupational Disease Disability Law, that the disease was given the knockout blow, the author points out.

This problem was unique to Utah and other mining areas, but other disease problems dealt with in this book were those of most parts of the country. Dr. Richards tells about heartbreaking times when two or three children in one family might be taken within a few days by diphtheria; when typhoid fever, smallpox and other communicable diseases, now practically conquered, were a constant menace to every community.

"Public health and sanitation," he says, "have achieved many victories, among which the conquering of typhoid fever takes first place. Perhaps 'conquering' is not the proper word, as the job is not quite finished. The main body of the army of typhoid has been completely routed, but there still remain scattered guerilla bands that come out of hiding now and then and create local disturbances in the form of a few cases or small epidemics."

### Pays Deserved Tribute

Dr. Richards pays deserved tribute to some of the early leaders in public health in the state. Of the late Dr. T. B. Beatty, long-time state health commissioner, he says: "Dr. Beatty did more for the improvement of the health of the people of Utah than any other medical man who ever practiced within the borders of the state."

On Dr. Samuel G. Paul, for many years Salt Lake City health commissioner, he gives this comment: "He laid the foundation for practically every essential improvement that eventuated in better health for the city."

These men, like others ahead of their time, were not fully appreciated until long after their pioneering work was started.

### Poignant Writings

Dr. Richards has interesting chapters on some of the leading medical practitioners of an earlier day, including his own father, Dr. Joseph S. Richards, to whom the book is dedicated. The short dedicatory chapter is a poignant bit of writing.

The author himself has played a prominent part in the more recent medical history of the state, and has been an ardent supporter of the University of Utah College of Medicine, whose advent was perhaps the most significant single event in that history. Dr. Richards is now clinical professor of surgery emeritus

Of Medicine, Hospitals and Doctors by Ralph T. Richards, M.D. University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City.

